CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (Original) A method of preparing a coated optical fiber for coupling to a face of an optical device, comprising:

(a) placing the coated fiber so that it extends through a stripping station, a cleaning station and a cleaving station,

(b) bringing a stripper at the stripping station into engagement with the fiber,

(c) effecting relative motion between the fiber and the stripping station, the cleaning station and the cleaving station lengthwise of the fiber, whereby the coating is stripped from a medial length segment of the fiber as said medial length segment passes through the stripping station,

(d) activating a cleaning device at the cleaning station and thereby cleaning fragments of coating material from said medial length segment of the fiber as said medial length segment passes through the cleaning station,

(e) deactivating the cleaning device and discontinuing stripping,

(f) positioning the fiber with said medial length segment of fiber at the cleaving station, and

(g) cleaving the fiber within said medial length segment, thereby providing the fiber with a freshly cleaved end region.

2. (Original) A method according to claim 1, wherein the step of activating the cleaning device includes creating an electric arc in the vicinity of the fiber.

3. (Original) A method according to claim 1, comprising inducing a flow of gas at the stripping station whereby coating material that is stripped from the fiber as the fiber passes through the stripping station is entrained in the flow of gas and removed from the fiber.

4. (Original) A method according to claim 1, further comprising removing the optical fiber so that it no longer extends through the stripping station, the cleaning station and the cleaving station, placing a second coated fiber so that it extends through the stripping station, the cleaning station and the cleaving station, and repeating steps (b)-(g).

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PAGE 4/8 * RCVD AT 12/23/2004 6:33:57 PM [Eastern Standard Time] * SVR:USPTO-EFXRF-1/0 * DNIS:8729306 * CSID:503 574 3197 * DURATION (mm-ss):02-14

5. (Original) A method according to claim 1, comprising removing electrostatic charge from at least the free end region of the coated fiber.

6. (Original) A method according to claim 1, comprising, before step (a), removing electrostatic charge from at least the free end region of the coated fiber.

7. (Original) A method according to claim 1, further comprising:

(h) cleaving the fiber within said medial length segment, thereby providing the fiber with a freshly cleaved end region, and

(i) coupling the freshly cleaved end region of the fiber to a test station.

8. (Original) A method according to claim 7, further comprising coupling the fiber to the face of the optical device at the test station, and testing the fiber using the optical device.

9. (Original) A method according to claim 7, wherein step (i) includes gripping the fiber upstream of said medial length segment using a clamp and advancing the clamp in the downstream direction and thereby advancing the freshly cleaved end region to the test station, and the method further comprises cutting the fiber upstream of the clamp, releasing the cut end segment of the fiber from the clamp and removing the cut end segment.

10. (Original) A method according to claim 7, wherein the coated optical fiber is a test fiber, the optical device is a buffer fiber connected to a test instrument, step (i) includes bringing the freshly cleaved end of the test fiber into alignment with an end region of the buffer fiber, and the method further comprises testing the test fiber using the test instrument.

11. (Original) A method according to claim 1, wherein step (c) comprises applying tension to the free end region of the fiber and thereby pulling the fiber through the stripping station, the cleaning station and the cleaving station.

PAGE 5/8 * RCVD AT 12/23/2004 6:33:57 PM [Eastern Standard Time] * SVR:USPTO-EFXRF-1/0 * DNIS:8729306 * CSID:503 574 3197 * DURATION (mm-ss):02-14

12. (Original) A method according to claim 11, comprising gripping the free end region of the fiber and developing an electrical signal representative of tension in the fiber upstream of the location at which the fiber is gripped.

13. (Original) A method according to claim 11, wherein step (f) comprises continuing to pull the fiber until said medial length segment of fiber is at the cleaving station.

14. (Original) A method according to claim 1, further comprising:

(h) cleaving the fiber within said medial length segment, thereby providing the fiber with a freshly cleaved end region.

15. (Original) A method according to claim 14, comprising applying tension to the free end region of the fiber between steps (g) and (h), and wherein step (h) comprises cleaving the fiber while the free end region of the fiber is under tension.

16. (Original) Apparatus for preparing a coated optical fiber for coupling to a face of an optical device, said apparatus comprising:

a stripper at a stripping station,

a cleaner at a cleaning station,

a cleaver at a cleaving station,

at least one clamp for selectively gripping a free end region of a fiber that extends though the stripping station, the cleaning station and the cleaving station, and

a control means for controlling the apparatus to perform the following operations:

activate the clamp to grip the free end region of the fiber,

activate the stripper to engage the fiber,

move the clamp in a direction to apply tension to the fiber to pull the fiber through the stripping station and strip coating material from a medial length segment of the fiber,

activate the cleaning device and thereby clean fragments of coating material from said medial length segment of the fiber as said medial length segment passes through the cleaning station,

deactivate the cleaning device,

PAGE 6/8 * RCVD AT 12/23/2004 6:33:57 PM [Eastern Standard Time] * SVR:USPTO-EFXRF-1/0 * DNIS:8729306 * CSID:503 574 3197 * DURATION (mm-ss):02-14

continue to move the clamp in said direction until said medial length segment of fiber is at the cleaving station;

apply tension to the medial length segment of the fiber,

while the medial length segment of the fiber is under tension, cleaving the fiber within said medial length segment, thereby providing the fiber with a freshly cleaved end region, and

move the clamp in said direction to advance the freshly cleaved end region of the fiber to a coupling station.

17-36 (Canceled)

37. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein step (c) comprises effecting said relative motion under control of an electrical signal and step (g) comprises cleaving the fiber under control of an electrical signal.

PAGE 7/8 * RCVD AT 12/23/2004 6:33:57 PM [Eastern Standard Time] * SVR:USPTO-EFXRF-1/0 * DNIS:8729306 * CSID:503 574 3197 * DURATION (mm-ss):02-14

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